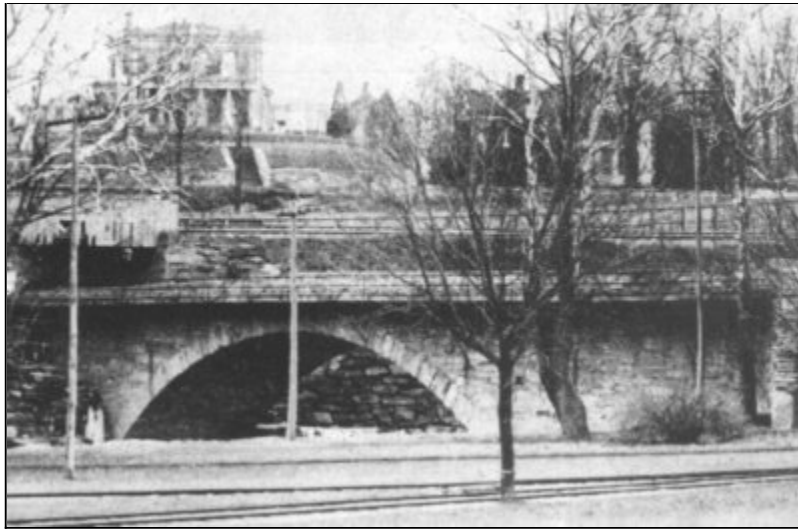


April 12, 1997

Ninety Years After its Rejection Wider Bridge is Coming (Part Three of Three)

In September, 1907, there was an attempt to get the Windham Road Bridge widened because of increasing traffic accidents. On October 7, 1907 a committee consisting of George E. Stiles, M. Eugene Lincoln and Thomas J. Kelley, was formed to prepare a report. It was presented at a Town Meeting on October 12, along with plans prepared by Mr. Denman of the Berlin Bridge Company. It was asked at the meeting if there would be room for two teams to pass on the bridge, outside the trolley track, when the addition was built. Mr. Denman replied that the total width on the bridge would be thirty-eight feet. Both the stone parapet walls would be taken down and replaced by cement walls, making twelve and one half feet extra roadway over the bridge. Denman continued: "The cement walls would be low ones. If there was need of crowding, the hubs on one side of a wagon could go over the cement wall. After tearing down the westerly parapet wall the tracks could be thrown further west two feet, giving that additional width to the roadway."



This interesting view of the bridge, looking south west, dates from the early 1890s. Note the electric poles, brand the railroad lines in the mill yard. Mill Five would be built on this site in 1899.

The meeting agreed an appropriation of \$12,000, but no contract would be signed until the plans for a stone widening were prepared. At the annual town Meeting on October 24, 1907, three bids were accepted for the bridge road widening. The Berlin Company presented plans for reinforced granite work for \$9600. The J. W. Bishop Company of Worcester, Mass., who were building American Thread's Mill Number Six, produced plans for a reinforced concrete roadway for \$10132. The W. N. Flynt Granite Company presented plans for a granite roadway for \$11000. The bids included work for changing the sewer, and moving the old sidewalk. The Bishop Company engaged itself to widen the bridge from 19 to 30 feet, the Berlin Company from 19 to 31 feet, six inches and the Flynt company from 19 to 30 feet.

The issue was voted upon, and the road widening scheme for the South Main Street Bridge was surprisingly rejected, by 51 votes to 36. The Chronicle reporter asked for opinions why the scheme was rejected, and the voters replied that the current dangers would not be eliminated by widening the bridge, and it would make no difference under the railroad bridge, considered to be the most dangerous place of all. The voters were in favor of waiting a little longer for a larger bridge, at some central point, to be used for trolley, carriage and foot passage. Maybe as compensation, The Bridge Street Bridge was modified in 1908 by the addition of a new overhanging sidewalk, built by the Berlin Bridge Company for \$480.

In 1912, the town records refer to the negative impact of automobiles on the town's ancient bridges. The following year an inspection of all the town's bridges was made, and the "lower stone arch bridge," was subsequently laid and rolled with gravel. In 1917 it was recommended that, "The bridge at the foot of Jillson Hill in the City should have the roadway paved with block paving as the traffic over the bridge has become very heavy, and any other treatment will not stand the wear." In 1920, the bridge was cemented at a cost of \$2175.⁸⁴ In 1925, the town decided to replace the old wooden bridges with concrete to eliminate all wood construction."

That new bridge, mentioned by the voters in the 1907 meeting, will soon be built some 90 years later. But the old stone bridge is still only 19 foot wide. When the new bridge is built, with its frog and spool ornamentation, this narrow, old stone bridge will be renamed the Bridge of Flowers, and be used as part of the Windham Mills' river walk. Remember its rich history.